United Nations A/70/79–E/2015/70

General Assembly
Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
27 April 2015

Original: English

General Assembly
Seventieth session
Item 123 of the preliminary list*
Strengthening of the United Nations system

Economic and Social Council
2015 session
21 July 2014-22 July 2015
Agenda item 20
United Nations research and training institutes

Consultations on research, training and library services

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report provides the requisite update to Member States, as requested by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2013/45, on the continuing consultations between the United Nations entities dedicated to research, training and library services on ways to enhance coherence and synergies. A comprehensive process of stakeholder consultations was undertaken to determine how to strengthen collaboration between research, training and library entities in the United Nations system.

2. The emergence of a new post-2015 development agenda and a rapidly evolving global context makes access to knowledge and information for key actors more essential than ever. High-quality knowledge and information is central to the effectiveness and overall success of the United Nations in implementing the new development agenda. Success in that regard requires a rich and diverse repository of knowledge with significant capacity to generate, collect and share knowledge among the intended beneficiaries.

3. Many entities in the United Nations system are involved in the production, management and dissemination of knowledge. Effective collaboration around identified results that cannot be achieved by any single actor can add significant value to the work of the entities. In order to develop a new model for such collaboration, the initial focus of the consultations was on the entities under the authority of the Secretary-General, namely, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, the Library of the United Nations Office at Geneva, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development and the United Nations System Staff College.

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4. Each of the entities involved in the consultations serves as a crucial component of knowledge services. The research entities generate original findings; libraries organize and disseminate information; and learning and training entities share knowledge and help to build the capacity of key actors. The overall objective of the consultations between the entities was to enhance voluntary collaboration for their mutual benefit, while leaving unchanged the existing legal status, mandates and governance structures of the entities.

5. The entities will be invited to collaborate through various voluntary arrangements tailored to the specific needs of their respective learning/training, research and library service knowledge areas. The arrangements include an advisory group on learning and training, voluntary research networks and a Libraries board.

6. Effective collaboration in the three areas of knowledge and information services requires facilitation and support at the highest level. Overall guidance on collaborative programmes and processes will be provided by a knowledge and learning steering committee to be convened under the leadership of the Secretary-General.

II. Advisory group on learning and training

7. Learning and training are central means for equipping representatives of Member States and United Nations staff members with the knowledge they need to help to address the cross-cutting and complex challenges of today's world. To respond to new and emerging issues, the United Nations urgently needs to scale up its capacity to provide training at all levels, in the form of learning opportunities for nationals of Member States, including government officials, and for non-governmental organizations and private sector entities, as well as training opportunities for United Nations staff members in all locations.

8. The Organization needs to harmonize the knowledge disseminated through learning and training programmes by improving the cross-fertilization and sharing between training programmes designed to build the capacity of Member States and other beneficiaries and training programmes for United Nations staff members. The United Nations system includes both suppliers and consumers of learning and training services. However, there is little alignment between the supply of and the demand for training services, resulting in the underutilization of existing training services and excessive expenditure on external procurement.

9. A holistic and coherent approach to the process of planning and developing learning and training programmes is required in order to achieve higher quality training programmes at a lower cost. UNITAR and the United Nations System Staff College are two dedicated training institutions within the United Nations system, one focused on training representatives of Member States, and the other on training United Nations staff members. Both institutions will work together more closely to identify and implement initiatives that improve the quality and impact of their respective training. Effective collaboration will be promoted through their respective governing bodies. As a first step, the two entities have signed a memorandum of understanding that sets out the principles of the partnership and identifies five areas of common focus (development, gender and human rights; peace and security; leadership development; e-learning techniques; and methods to assess and evaluate training results), in which collaboration should enhance the impact of both entities.

10. An example of the potential of the above-mentioned collaboration is the initiative to enhance knowledge at the country level on the post-2015 process and emerging agenda. As part of the initiative, UNITAR is developing a briefing package targeting national actors, while the United Nations System Staff College is providing guidance to the United Nations country teams on how best to support Governments in delivering the briefings. The objective of this kind of collaboration is to provide higher quality training at a lower cost, so benefitting both suppliers and clients.

11. An advisory group on learning and training will aim to achieve greater coherence between the two currently separate streams of training services, "training" and "capacity-building", in order to maximize the of the investment in training and learning services. The advisory group will bring together the major learning and training providers in the United Nations system to ensure greater alignment between supply and demand.

12. The advisory group will focus on how to improve programme development and increase cross-fertilization. It will also work to enhance collaboration for capacity development by preparing staff members to deliver training to Member State officials at the country level. The two streams of training services will be linked in order to ensure sharing of knowledge and information technology resources that are relevant to both, leading to enhanced results for Member States.

III. Research networks

13. In-depth knowledge within the United Nations system is spread widely, is often highly relevant to the Organization's work and institutional development and is often very specialized. The new development agenda, however, requires greater attention to the interconnected nature of the issues at stake. Knowledge of the United Nations also often resides outside the United Nations system, and the United Nations has not always taken sufficient advantage of outside resources in reflecting on how it can move ahead substantively.

14. Bearing these two realities in mind, the United Nations University has agreed to explore the possibility with United Nations researchers of identifying cases in which working together more frequently (and sometimes in parallel in mutually beneficial ways) in support of the new development agenda would work to the advantage of all concerned. This would be the case for the knowledge and research capabilities harboured within United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and for the research entities based in Geneva and Turin, Italy, such as the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute and UNITAR. Any such consultation should extend beyond the United Nations to high-quality research teams around the world with significant knowledge of and ideas on the United Nations system.

15. Collaboration in research needs to occur voluntarily among the entities and individuals concerned, with the understanding that much will be gained by joint efforts and through voluntary networks for issue-specific or problem-driven collaboration. Collaboration will occur more frequently on issues relevant to the United Nations if relevant entities inside and outside the United Nations system and expert individual researchers have the opportunity to engage in substantive dialogue with one another.

16. The project is ambitious and involves a large number of United Nations entities and researchers from outside the United Nations system. The initiative will take some time to implement and will require the support of Member States and the researchers themselves, with regard to both the aim and the approach.

17. In addition to research conducted in support of normative decision-making processes, some research entities, such as the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, are involved in applied research to develop training programmes for national capacity development. Similarly, UNITAR is involved in both training and research. By establishing where research and training agendas are compatible and indeed mutually reinforce one another, the entities will be able to determine cases in which working together will enhance outcomes. Synergies between the research and training entities will be supported through the knowledge and learning steering committee and the governing bodies of the respective research and training entities.

IV. Libraries board

18. The libraries of the United Nations capture, organize and provide information of value and relevance to the agenda and activities of the United Nations, in particular for delegates and staff members, but also partner libraries, external researchers and other clients. The United Nations libraries are geographically dispersed and respond to the distinct functions and needs of local organizations and regions. However, there are common processes and features across the libraries; coordination will therefore increase their impact. Digital technology provides an opportunity for change and collaboration.

19. The alignment of the relevant processes in the two largest libraries in the Secretariat — the Dag Hammarskjöld Library in New York and the Library of the United Nations Office at Geneva — is a first step. A new Secretariat Libraries board will be set up to provide strategic guidance and advice to support a coherent management approach, while respecting the specific mandates, reporting lines and budgetary structures of the libraries concerned.

20. The Libraries board will bring together the senior managers in the entities responsible for the libraries and in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. It will provide guidance on and continued support to common approaches for the library-related activities of the two entities in order to:

(a) Advance the missions of the libraries by raising awareness of and strengthening their role in the management and dissemination of United Nations knowledge by providing strategic advice and support for project-driven fundraising efforts and the development of institutional partnerships inside and outside the Organization, among other things;

(b) Direct a new operational working committee of all Secretariat libraries, which focuses on practical cooperation on substantive and technical issues to:

(i) Ensure guidance and strategic support for the management of United Nations public documents and publications;

(ii) Enable resource-sharing, in the form of content, people (skills and knowledge) and technology, providing high-level support for the development of a common information management infrastructure, including a single global

United Nations digital repository for official documentation, research, studies and statistics so as to ensure access to, and the preservation of, the knowledge created by the Organization;

(iii) Develop a seamless client experience through joint services to facilitate the work of a globally mobile Secretariat staff and the online community inside and outside the Organization;

(iv) Revitalize the role and the operations of the global network of United Nations depository libraries, which act as distributors and interpreters of United Nations content on the ground in most Member States;

(v) Formulate a client-oriented strategy to assess stakeholder needs and ensure the development of services and products across the library network that are aligned to stakeholder requirements.

21. With the support of the Libraries board, the two leading libraries will play an important standard-setting role for all Secretariat libraries. The board will provide authority and guidance to all Secretariat libraries, which will continue to be joined through a new operational working committee focusing on practical cooperation.

22. In a later phase, if supported by key stakeholders, the Libraries board could be extended to include the libraries of the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system.

V. Knowledge and learning steering committee

23. If the United Nations is to address the complex challenges of the twenty-first century successfully, the three important knowledge and learning areas outlined above all need to be deployed coherently. Generating, managing and disseminating knowledge and information are distinct yet interrelated processes. To that end, an internal knowledge and learning steering committee will be established. The committee will build on the work of a former research and training coordination committee and will provide a forum through which the complementarities and linkages of the three areas can be maximized to better meet the needs of their clients and stakeholders. To address the shortcomings of the former research and training coordination committee, the new committee will operate under the guidance of the Secretary-General and will focus on concrete initiatives for enhanced results through collaboration between the members.

24. Membership in the steering committee, and the link this provides to the Secretary-General, will enhance the voice of the knowledge entities on issues relating to knowledge and learning within the Organization. The provision of senior-level leadership will encourage more active collaboration around shared results and will help to overcome organizational barriers to collaboration. Ultimately, the steering committee will foster the horizontal, cross-cutting and issue-based knowledge and information work necessary to address the complex challenges of today's world.